

XIV.—*Quesal-shooting in Vera Paz*.

By OSBERT SALVIN, M.A., F.Z.S.

As the greater part of this account of the mode of collecting Quesals (*Pharomacrus paradiseus*), as pursued by the Coban hunters, was written at the time in the form of a diary, I have thought it best to preserve it in the same shape throughout.

March 1.—Rain all day and every day is what one must expect to encounter on visiting Coban. Such was the weather in November, and now, the month of March brings no signs of the dry season, when in Guatemala people have almost forgotten what rain is. When travelling from place to place, the fates have in general been propitious, and on coming here they did not desert me. Two fine days enabled me to reach Coban from San Gerónimo with a dry skin, but the next day the usual driving, misty rain greeted us on rising, and morning after morning brings no change for the better. Luckily, I have found plenty of indoors work in arranging and labelling the collections made during my absence. Moreover, Coban has this advantage. A mere hint at what branch of natural history one has a leaning towards is sufficient to bring in specimens in an almost unbroken stream. Boy follows boy, till one hardly knows which way to turn to stow away the spoils in the shape of birds, snakes, lizards, toads, frogs, &c., and no small amount of time is occupied in paying these young rascals (for they all try to cheat) for their captures. Like everything else, my work appears to have an end. The birds are finished and packed, novelties are no longer brought in. The period of my stay being limited, idleness cannot be long endured, and I am determined, rain or no rain, to be off to the mountain-forests in search of Quesals, to see and shoot which has been a day-dream for me ever since I set foot in Central America. Having secured the services of Cipriano Prado, the most successful Quesal-hunter in Coban, and at the same time a bird-collector of no mean ability, and also of Filipe Sierra, another hunter of Coban, we are beginning to prepare for the journey. It is necessary to take provisions, and we are accordingly laying in a stock of salt meat, 'pixtones' (round maize cakes $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch thick), 'tamalis' (maize puddings), and 'topopoxti'

(thin maize cakes not unlike oat-cake), all of which have to be started the day previous to our own departure, on the backs of five Indians. Our proposed hunting-ground is distant three days' journey from Coban, two of which lie along a road passable for mules. We therefore reckon on catching up our cargoes on the second day, and then proceeding on together. The road we intend to take is that between Coban and Cajabon, which we follow as far as San Agustin Lanquin, and leaving our animals there to be sent back to Coban, make for the ridge of mountains to the northward, and follow them in a westerly direction towards Coban.

March 6.—The road over the Mico mountain near Yzabal, so graphically described by Stevens, is a trifle to that which we have just passed,—slippery clay, mud and stones combining to make progress difficult, and falling easy. In fact, it was just about as bad a road as one could pass mounted. Cipriano in descending a hill was stretched on his back. Though he complains a good deal of himself, his gun, I think, will prove to be the worst sufferer, as an old crack in the stock has opened and we have been obliged to tie it together with string, after the fashion of Gordon Cumming's rifle. My mule was down on her knees several times, but we both managed to rise together. Filipe fared no better. To-night we are to sleep under a rancho or 'ermita,' that is to say, a roof upon poles sheltering three crosses. Few of these roadside huts have any walls. Small as our lodging is, it affords shelter to some twenty-five souls; for besides ourselves, and an Indian to carry the hammocks and a change of clothes, some twenty Indians are congregated here for the night, some bound for Coban, some in the opposite direction, but all carrying their cargoes of onions, maize, &c., for sale or exchange. In my hammock I swing clear of everything except the smoke from the wood fire, the least objectionable of evils attendant upon a night spent in an Indian rancho. My blankets I had sewn into bags before leaving Coban, so that I am well provided against cold, which in the mountains is sometimes severe. This plan of sleeping in a bag is well adapted for a hammock, where covering below as well as above is necessary, as this desirable end is not so easily or so effectually arrived at by means of the ordinary blanket.

March 7.—Soon after starting I shot a fine specimen of *Accipiter erythrocnemis*, and shortly afterwards one out of a pair of *Ictinia plumbea*. This last species seems to be particularly partial to patches of pine trees, which grow at intervals all through the Alta Vera Paz. The road was no improvement upon that of yesterday, and though we had not far to go, it was late in the afternoon when we reached Lanquin. Finding that Fray Domingo Lopez, the Padre Cura of Cajabon, was in the village, we went to the convent and there put up.

March 8.—As it is necessary to take a 'practico' or guide with us to the mountains, I had purposed spending a day in Lanquin to find one, and also two Indians, as two of those hired at Coban have to return with the mules and saddles. A guide is absolutely necessary, as my companions have never explored these districts; and a knowledge of those parts most frequented by the Quesals, as well as of the springs of water, is indispensable to the success of the expedition. Moreover we might lose ourselves in these forests for days, and the consequences would be serious. Most places have their 'lion,' and Lanquin is not an exception to the rule; the 'lion' in this case being a cave, out of which the river of Lanquin emerges. This stream helps to swell the river of Cajabon, and finally flows into the Polochic. The interior of the cave is said to be beautifully festooned with stalactites. It becoming known that we have resolved on an inspection of it, a number of Indians, boys and men, follow us from the village, and these, with two I have hired to carry pine for torches, swell our party to some twenty individuals. Each takes his bundle of chips, and all having fired their torches, we go in. These caves are always curious and interesting to see; but the half-naked Indians, each with his lighted torch, scrambling about the rocks in all directions and shouting to the echoes, enhance the strangeness of the scene. After winding in and out and climbing up and down among slippery stones, now stooping to pass a narrow opening, now gazing upwards into vacant blackness or downwards into similar obscurity, we reach the point where the river flows at the bottom of the cavern, not in an unbroken stream, but among large masses of rock, over which we scramble. Having satisfied curiosity, and the torches beginning to

dwindle, I sound a retreat, as, had we been left in darkness, no amount of groping would bring us out. This cave would appear to be of great length; the river that flows from it forms no mean stream. On leaving the cave I begin to collect ferns, many species of which are growing about the rocks and surrounding trees*. Whilst thus engaged, a shower of fruit from a neighbouring tree calls my attention, and looking up, I spy a 'Mico leon' (*Cercoptes caudivolvulus*) regaling himself on a well-loaded bough. I immediately send a boy back for my gun, which I have left at the mouth of the cave, intending to return. Mico leon however makes off, but Cipriano and Filipe are soon on his track. The latter fires a shot, and I another, when the animal falls into the water and swims to the other side. Not being able to climb the bank, two Indians strip off their only garment, swim the river, despatch Mico leon, and bring him over between them. These Indians swim well and rapidly, striking out first with one arm and then the other, throwing each out of the water at every stroke.

March 9.—A downpour of rain, misty, drizzling, continuous. However, Cipriano and I pay a visit to the cave, but the forest being too wet to shoot, and rain falling, I collect ferns and land-shells under the shelter of the overhanging rock. On returning to the convent I am for the rest of the day beset with Indians, men and boys, women and girls, bringing lizards, snakes, &c., showing the same excellent collecting qualities as the Coban Indians.

March 10.—Still raining in the same incessant way,—not a thunderstorm and clear sky afterwards, as during the rainy season in the neighbourhood of Guatemala. At Coban and the Alta Vera Paz, it seems to rain at any hour and at any season.

March 11.—Still in Lanquin, but the weather decidedly improving. During the afternoon we go out to shoot. Observing on a pine-tree about a dozen nests of *Ocyalus wagleri*, with which the old birds are busy, I send for an axe and have the tree cut down, but find neither eggs nor young in the nests. The birds

* The collection I made during this expedition, as well as all that I obtained in other places, I have submitted to Sir W. Hooker, who has most kindly named the whole for me. Amongst the species are several novelties.

were only preparing to breed. Besides this colony I see little of interest—a few Toucans (*Ramphastos carinatus*) and other common birds.

March 12.—Off to the mountains at last, with a fine day and a fair prospect of success. The road after crossing the river strikes off to the northward—a mountain track winding among the hills. Soon after entering the forest a river crosses the path—a foaming torrent—a fall into which gives no hope of escape. A felled tree, one of the largest of the forest, forms the bridge, over which, slippery with moss and foam, we have to pass. For ourselves it is nothing; but I must say I tremble for the Indians, each of whom carries his 75 lbs. of cargo. In the worst and most slippery part the foot-hold is somewhat improved by the tree being notched with a 'machete,' but still it is as dangerous a pass as I ever crossed. After half an hour's delay we reach the other bank. One 'mozo' only turned faint-hearted, and another carried his pack across. From the river the path becomes very precipitous, and we continue to climb till we reach the foot of a rock, where we find a deserted rancho and take possession. A fire having been made to heat the pixtones, we dine, and afterwards start for the forest close by to look for Quesals. On entering, the path takes the unpleasant form of a succession of felled trees, which are slippery from recent rains, and render progress slow. My companions are ahead, and I am just balancing myself along the last trunk, when Filipe comes running back to say that they have heard a Quesal. Of course, being especially anxious to watch, as well as to shoot one of these birds myself, I immediately hurry to the spot. I sit down upon my wide-awake in most approved style close to Cipriano, who is calling the bird, and wait, all eyes and ears, for the result. I have not to wait long. A distant clattering note indicates that the bird is on the wing. He settles—a splendid male—on a bough of a tree not seventy yards from where we are hidden. Cipriano wants to creep up to within shot, but I keep him back, wishing to risk the chance of losing a specimen rather than miss such an opportunity of seeing the bird in its living state and of watching its movements. It sits almost motionless on its perch, the body remaining in the same position, the head only moving slowly

from side to side. The tail does not hang quite perpendicularly, the angle between the true tail and the vertical being perhaps as much as 15 or 20 degrees. The tail is occasionally jerked open and closed again, and now and then slightly raised, causing the long tail-coverts to vibrate gracefully. I have not seen all. A ripe fruit catches the Quesal's eye, and he darts from his perch, hovers for a moment, plucks the berry, and returns to his former position. This is done with a degree of elegance that defies description. The remark has often been made by persons looking at stuffed Humming-birds, "What lovely little things these must look in life, when they are flying about!" But they do not. Place a Humming-bird twenty yards from you, and what do you see of its colours, except in the most favourable position and light? This is not the case with the Quesal. The rich metallic green of the head, back, and tail-coverts reflects its colour in every position, whilst the deep scarlet of the breast and the white of the tail show vividly at a distance, and contrast with the principal colour of the body. The living Quesal strikes the eye by its colour at once. It stands unequalled for splendour among birds of the New World, and is hardly surpassed among those of the Old. Such are my reflections, when a low whistle from Cipriano calls the bird nearer, and a moment afterwards it is in my hand—the first Quesal I have seen and shot.

This same evening we hear the cries of another pair of Quesals, but they refuse to listen to the voice of the charmer. A long chase after a pair of Pauhil (*Crax globicera*), which results in an ineffectual shot, now brings the day to a close, and, the path being neither very clear nor good, I think it best to return. On my way back I shoot a specimen of *Sclerurus mexicanus*, a bird I have never seen before. Its habits much resemble those of a Wren. I never saw either this individual, or others met with subsequently, climbing like a *Dendrocolaptes*, but usually hopping about the brushwood, and frequently on the ground, scratching among the dead leaves. The cry of the *Sclerurus* is shrill and may be heard at some distance.

There is one bird in these forests which I became acquainted with, but was unable to procure. Nor could I obtain a more

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satisfactory account of its appearance than that it was coffee-coloured, and about the size of a small Thrush. Its song, which I heard frequently, is most peculiar, and comprises some of the highest notes I ever heard from any bird. It is clear and melodious, without having any great variation. The name commonly applied to it is the '*ruiseñor*,' or Nightingale. I think it probable that the bird may be one of the numerous Wrens found in the country.

The cries of the Quesal are various. They consist principally of a low double note, "*whe-oo, whe-oo*," which the bird repeats, whistling it softly at first, and then gradually swelling it into a loud but not unmelodious cry. This is often succeeded by a long note, which begins low, and after swelling dies away as it began. Both these notes can be easily imitated by the human voice. The bird's other cries are harsh and discordant. They are best imitated by doubling a pliant leaf over the first fingers, which must be held about two inches apart. The two edges of the leaf being then placed in the mouth and the breath drawn in, the required sound is produced. Cipriano was an adept at imitating these cries, but I failed in producing them for want of practice. When searching for Quesals the hunter whistles as he walks along, here and there sitting down and repeating the other notes. As soon as he hears a bird answering at a distance he stops, and imitates the bird's cries until it has approached near enough to enable him either to shoot it from where he stands, or to creep up to within shot. The female generally flies up first and perches on a tree near the hunter, who takes no notice of her, but continues calling till the male, who usually quickly follows the female, appears. Should the male not show himself, the hunter will sometimes shoot the female. Thus it is that so large a proportion of males are shot. The flight of the Quesal is rapid and straight; the long tail-feathers, which never seem to be in his way, stream after him. The bird is never found except in forests composed of the highest trees, the lower branches of which (*i.e.* those at about two-thirds of the height of the tree from the ground) seem to be its favourite resort. Its food consists principally of fruit, but occasionally a caterpillar may be found in its stomach. The

colouring of the soft parts is as follows:—Iris very dark hazel. Eyelid black. Bill yellow, with an olive tinge at the base, extending over the nostril along one-third of the upper and two-thirds of the under mandible. Legs and toes olive; soles of the feet more yellow. Claws horny olive.

The following morning, March 13, we make an early start for the same forests, intending to take a wide circuit and return to our camp under the rock the same evening. Five Quesals and a Pava (*Penelope purpurascens*) are the result of our day's work.

March 14.—Having accomplished the great object of my expedition, viz. to see a Quesal myself, I find my time too valuable to bestow more attention on them, when so many other objects of interest lie within my reach. I accordingly leave Cipriano and Filipe to hunt up birds, whilst I confine my attention to the ferns, shells, &c. I have never visited these forests of Vera Paz before, and my impression is that they are almost the best worth seeing of anything in Guatemala. The forests of the coasts are rich in all the beauties which have been the theme of so many travellers, but they have their disadvantages. The excessive heat is always a drawback; and if garrapatas abound, one's enjoyment is gone. In these mountain-forests it is otherwise; no garrapatas, no mosquitos, and a climate that in the dry season might challenge any in the world. Most parts are '*montaña limpia*' (forest free from brushwood), and one may ramble where one pleases, without being stopped by dense thickets. What strikes the eye most is the number of ferns, not only of plants, but species. Every tree is clasped and every stone clothed with them. Besides, there are many arborescent species, and others of terrestrial habit. Palms of low growth and various form also are a marked characteristic of the forest. Few sounds are heard; the low murmur of insects contrasts strangely with the din of the coast forests. Birds are not often met with. An occasional Creeper (*Dendrocolaptes*) may be seen or its cry heard; the peculiar thrilling notes of the Ruiseñor, the distant call of a Trogon, the cooing of a Pigeon, the melancholy wailing of the Pava (*Penelope purpurascens*), or the noisier call of the Colola (*Tinamus*), include nearly all the sounds one

hears from the feathered tribes. Should, however, a troop of Monos (*Myietes palliatus*?) be within hearing, every echo of the forest is awakened with their discordant bellowings, which it is no exaggeration to say may be heard at the distance of a league.

March 15.—After some delay we start westward again, as, from what we can gather from the Indians, it seems evident that we have reached the limits of the Quesals in this direction, and the country between us and Coban seems to offer the best prospect of success. The only mishap that overtakes us is the leakage of my large bottle full of reptiles. On examination the cork proves imperfect—a defect easily remedied, had not the Indian who carried it got it into his head that the rum having snakes in it would produce festering sores wherever it touched him! After a great deal of arguing on the subject, I induce one of the guides to take charge of the maligned bottle. That night we reach a large ‘*ermita*,’ where we sleep, and secure another guide for the next day to conduct us to the district of Rashchay, said to abound with Quesals.

March 16.—On going out I perceive a pair of *Ictinia plumbea* preparing to build in a pine-tree close to the rancho we have been sleeping in. As there is no chance of procuring the eggs, I secure the birds for my collection. On entering the forest, a fine male *Trogon massena* falls to Cipriano’s gun. This, three Quesals, and a few other birds, form the day’s bag. A rancho half in ruins in a small clearing in the forest gives us shelter to-night. We prop up one corner, which has a deplorable tendency to droop for want of its corner post, and patch up the most open places in the roof with the extra stock of ‘*suyacales*’ (mats made of reeds to cover an Indian’s pack) we have brought from Lanquin. Filipe’s hammock gives way on the first trial and lets him down with a run; mine seems inclined to remain where it is.

March 17.—A heavy rain tests our last night’s repairs, and it requires no small amount of managing to place ourselves and our baggage out of the drops that fall in many places from the roof. The day clears up at 10 o’clock, and I send Cipriano and Filipe in different directions with a guide apiece to shoot Quesals, whilst I and the third guide search for other things.

My bag to-day consists of a Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), two specimens of a beautiful Tanager (*Pyrranga erythromelana*), and a large addition to my collection of ferns. Cipriano and Filipe bring in seven Quesals between them, and one of the guides a single specimen of *Vireolanius pulchellus*.

March 18.—As my time is limited, I have decided to remain in this spot, which seems likely to be productive, as long as I can, and then return straight to Coban. All to-day Cipriano and Filipe have been out; I have been chiefly occupied in skinning the specimens which resulted from yesterday's excursion. I have taken no small amount of pains to secure good examples for my own collection, as I wish my Trogon-drawer to look as well as possible. To-day Cipriano and I have had a long chase after some Parrots, one of which we have at last secured*. It cost us many a fruitless shot, as the trees in which we find them are of great height, and a bird at the top of one of them is almost out of gun-shot. We had just secured this bird when a distant noise warned us of approaching heavy rain, and we had just time to reach our camp when a thunderstorm came on—a real tropical storm. It is astonishing to notice the noise rain makes in the forest when striking the leaves of the trees. An approaching storm may be heard many minutes before the rain comes up.

March 19.—All last night rain fell in torrents, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Rills of water we had stepped across yesterday are now small rivers, and the whole night long we could hear the crash of falling trees. My companions were seriously alarmed lest we should be swept away. I did not share their anxiety, as the limits to which watercourses rise are easily traced, and I knew that we were safe. The downfall of our rancho was a danger much more imminent. To-day we have a long journey before us, and I order an early break-up of the camp. On the road we shoot several Quesals, and I add materially to my collection of ferns. The day is far advanced when I find that our guide has missed his way, and knows no

✓ * This bird proved to be an undescribed species. It now stands as *Pionus hæmatotis*, ScL. et Salv., and a drawing of it will be found in the second volume of this Journal, plate 13.

more about the road or where he is than one of us. During the day I had not paid much attention to the course we were taking, except to know that we were going nearly in the right direction. My pocket compass now comes into requisition, and starting on the principle that a path must lead somewhere, we strike the most likely-looking route, which in time brings us to an uninhabited rancho in a clearing of Indian corn. In this we establish ourselves for the night.

March 20.—As no one seems to have a very clear idea of the road, I, compass in hand, undertake the direction of affairs. Three hours' walk brings us into a part of the country known to Cipriano, and we presently strike a road which takes us over a high range of hills which we were skirting all yesterday. While ascending, I observe several Swallow-tailed Kites (*Elanoides furcatus*) soaring above me. This bird has wonderful powers of flight: no eagle or vulture could sail more easily or gracefully in the air. Like *Ictinia plumbea*, I believe that this species breeds in the patches of pine trees which are found here and there throughout the forest. I gather this belief from common report. A little Indian village, by name Kohak, is our resting-place to-night. Here we are all billeted upon some Indians inhabiting a large long rancho with a family at each end. The inmates seem to have a decided turn for music, and we have not long established ourselves when Cipriano pitches upon a guitar and Filipe on a harp. They are now hard at work, accompanied by an Indian playing on a kind of drum, knocking out Indian tunes as fast as they can remember them. I have made myself comfortable for the night in my hammock, and am endeavouring to fancy myself in the act of being soothed to sleep by the dulcet strains that assail my ears. A long day's work is likely to be more effectual.

March 21.—Nine leagues yet to walk before we reach Coban. I give out that I mean to finish our journey to-day; the rest say no. Mountain fare has left me in capital training, and I feel confident of doing it if I can only get the Indians along. To lighten their loads I hire another Indian, so that they have no excuse for lagging. Four leagues brings us to the Lanquin road, and we eat the last of our 'toppoxti' at a place called

Kakiton. Here I cheer the Indians with some of their favourite drink, '*chicha*,' which is neither more nor less than fermented liquor before it is distilled. I then walk on and reach Coban at half-past five o'clock. My companions and the Indians arrive at eight o'clock, and thus bring my last expedition in Guatemala to a conclusion.

XV.—*Notes on the Birds of the Falkland Islands.* By Captain C. C. ABBOTT, late in command of Detachments in the Falkland Islands.

THESE notes are the result of personal observations made during a residence of three years, from February 1858 to October 1860, at Stanley, the seat of government of the Falkland Islands, whilst I was in command of the detachments of troops stationed there. During this period I made frequent excursions into the interior of the island, both north and south, and lost no opportunity of collecting specimens myself, and of obtaining information relating to the birds and other objects of natural history by every means in my power. I also sent home a large number of skins and eggs, which have now found their way into the different Museums of Europe.

1. CATHARTES AURA (Linn.)*. (Turkey Buzzard.)

Turkey Buzzards are very common in East Falkland, remaining the whole year round and breeding. They lay their eggs, two in number (but sometimes three), under a high bank amongst bushes, or on the top of a dead balsam log, without constructing any sort of nest. The time of their laying is about the first week in November. I have remarked that the young birds of the first year have the bare space on the head and neck of a bluish colour, as also the feet. In the mature bird these are both pink. These birds go in pairs the whole year round, though of course any dead carcase will bring many of them together.

* The scientific names here given are those adopted by Mr. Slater in his "Catalogue of the Birds of the Falkland Islands" (Proc. Zool. Soc. 1860, p.382, and 1861, Feb. 12th). The English names, added in parentheses, are those employed by the colonists for the species known to them.